

RAC Meeting Notes: November 19, 2002

Attending: Garth Taylor, Mel Quale, Loyd Briggs, Kent Christopher, Jeff Baldwin, Dennis Crane, Ken Sanders, Gwen Montgomery, Bob Bronson, Kelly Adams, Chris Christiansen

BLM Attending: Joe Kraayenbrink, David Howell, Phil Damon, Dennis Hutchison, Rick VanderVoet, Scott Barker, Sky Huffaker

Other Attending: Kitty Kunz (Congressman Simpson), Jim Morris, Francoise Cleveland (Sen. Craig), John Atkins (Sen. Crapo), Charlotte Reid (Blackfoot WSR)

Not Attending: Shaun Dustin (congrats on the new baby!), Pat Avery (Phoenix, National RAC Meeting), Morgan Evans, Steve Thorson

RAC Orientation Session:

FULL RAC MEETING:

Windland Energy Inc. Presentation: Proposed wind energy project on BLM land near Burley. Scoping meetings to be held in January. Questions answered about proposed size of towers and blades, and potential impacts on migratory birds (perches, bird kills, migratory patterns). Additional questions about how the towers may affect springs; the applicants aren't aware of springs on the ridge top but will follow up. The question seems to concern potential fracturing of rock and impact on groundwater. The applicants also don't want to fracture the rock, because they need a firm foundation for the towers.

Potential economic impacts up front during construction (potential cost: \$200 million), but it will bring additional revenues into local area, and potential jobs. Probably going to take about two years for construction during summer season. When: Currently documenting wind readings with anemometers, and working now on a right of way for the project, which requires a plan amendment. Would like to have a right of way completed, approved, etc. in 2004.

Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve – Management Plan: Review of public process to this point, including review of scoping. Among the issues in scoping was that of hunting, which has since been covered in legislation creating the Preserve. Thus, hunting will not be covered in the management plan.

Review of alternatives, which at this point is not set in stone; RAC members are free to mark up maps and make suggestions. Alt A is No Action. Alt B emphasizes an increase in recreation use and traffic. Alt C is more of a passive management alternative, de-emphasizing what is already happening in the No Action alternative. Alt D emphasizes active management for natural resources, or continuing landscape restoration work, road

networks allow fire suppression and weed management, and possible higher recreation use. Grazing decisions will be made using the Standards and Guides process.

A subgroup was authorized by the RAC to follow in Craters issues and bring recommendations back to the full RAC. Members include current RAC members Jeff Baldwin, Chris Christiansen, and Mel Quale. Group also suggested livestock permittee Rochelle Oxarango be contacted for participation.

Feedback from RAC Executive Session: RAC Chair is Kelly Adams, Vice Chair is Ken Sanders, Jeff Baldwin is Secretary. Officers will be chosen annually by majority vote. // Minutes: Jeff takes minutes, and so does Kelly. Dave is also taking minutes for the RAC meeting, and his minutes will continue to be on the website. // Potential future topics: OHV Planning -- This issue should also be a statewide issue, and possibly with Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands. // February meeting in Burley, and State Director has been invited. K Lynn Bennett is planning to attend. // Training for new RAC members on rangeland ecosystem management: Potential for help from State level or National Training Center for standardized curriculum for at-home study/field day for new members.

Q: (Mel Q): How do we communicate to the rest of the RAC about an issue for RAC consideration? A: Best way is to speak directly to the Field Manager, if looking for information. If it comes to the point that the RAC wants to make a resolution for the rest of the members, the issue should be taken up at a RAC meeting.

Q: (Jeff B): Is a “No comment” response appropriate for BLM issues (RAC member responding to BLM)? A lot of times the stuff I get looks fine, and I have no comments about it. A: That is fine, although it would be nice to talk to the manager and tell him/her so.

DM Update: Jim May is CO, and may stay for a few more weeks. // New State Director K Lynn Bennett, and the BLM Executive Leadership Team met in California last week with all the new managers. One issue raised last week was the issue of sage grouse, and how do deal with it in light of it not being listed. The Director has asked for national-level attention. // FAIR Act: Definition – looking at operations and maintenance positions and what may be contracted out. It’s in the study stage, and no federal employees will lose jobs, but will be retrained in impacted areas. Our District is part of a pilot project to study the issue with BLM in Idaho. There are still questions that have to be answered. // Budget: We are under a continuing resolution until appropriation bills are passed. // APHIS EIS: Has been completed nationally looking at chemical impacts. Now they are working on a project level EA, possibly for all of Southern Idaho.

Shoshone Land Use Plan Amendments: Draft document is being revised and will publish the final later this year. Not many comments about the plan, except for several comments from the environmental community about the ACECs. The proposed decision is a lot like the proposed action in the draft document, and the decision document will be much smaller than the draft EA. We may expect some protests from environmental groups if

ACECs aren't approved. We may also be able to begin on land exchanges that have been in a holding pattern for 15 years.

National RAC Videoconference

Director's challenges: Population Growth is an indicator of changes in the West. This is a challenge for public land managers, and for local communities close to public lands.

Wildfires: catastrophic seasons in 2002 and 2000. We are also dealing with changes in uses on public lands, and more litigation.

Communications Work Group:

- ◇ Recommendation: appoint a National RAC Coordinator: Create website information on a national basis, be a clearinghouse for information and coordinate with Director and Secretary.
- ◇ Recommend a State RAC Coordinator in each state: Similar to above, but may potentially be a part time position.
- ◇ Public Service Announcements on BLM programs: including display ads.
- ◇ All RACs should have information on the websites
- ◇ Information for potential RAC members
- ◇ PowerPoint presentation for Orientation on RACs
- ◇ National RAC meetings annually, and should also schedule statewide RACs.
- ◇ Vacancies should be filled sooner rather than later.
- ◇ Existing RAC members should be mentored by other members within their categories.
- ◇ Save application for possible future membership.
- ◇ Encourage managers to attend meetings:
- ◇ Encourage RAC members to get into community and talk about the use of the RAC and BLM issues.

Administrative Management of RACs:

- ◇ Establish a pool of candidates
- ◇ BLM should ensure that qualified candidates are appointed to RAC.
- ◇ State Offices should be involved in the RAC nomination process.
- ◇ Younger people should be encouraged to participate through subgroups and internships.
- ◇ Geographic distribution should be considered in appointments.
- ◇ Conflicts of interest should be reported.
- ◇ RAC should review Charters yearly, and revise charters bi-annually.
- ◇ RACs need an expedited process for filling mid-term vacancies.
- ◇ Interaction between RACs and BLM managers should be defined better.
- ◇ Subgroups should be clarified.
- ◇ Relationship between RAC and other advisory councils should be clarified.
- ◇ Information needed about charters, what differences are, and why.

- ◇ All RACs should be treated equally, including reimbursement and meeting refreshments.
- ◇ Standard orientation process should be implemented for all RACs, and then customized for local issues.

Future Resource Issues:

- ◇ Demographics:
 - Changes in land ownership: including sources of income for people using public lands
 - Urban Sprawl: including continued need for the agency to become partners with local agencies in land use planning:
 - Changes in types of people: more urban population, changes in ethnic groups, immigrants, youth, etc.
 - Recreation Use, Eco-tourism
 - Public may be less well-informed about public lands.
- ◇ Funding
 - RACs may seek partners to help fund innovative programs.
 - RACs should gather public input: may be less threatening than the agency looking for it.
 - RACs should help spread the word to local governments and groups.
 - BLM should conduct a survey of quality of life issues, so that RAC may help determine incentives/benefits to the public of BLM programs.
- ◇ Education
 - How can the RACs help educate the public about public lands issues?
 - Need to evaluate current and future programs.
 - Can BLM and its partners create good news and help get it out?

Planning:

- ◇ Each State Office and Field Office needs to articulate its goals projects and programs on a regular basis, including timing and deliverables, and priorities.
- ◇ RAC needs to understand timing of projects and progress. Some are long-term and some are short-term.
- ◇ Prioritizing RAC Workload: need to understand the positions of other RACs and other agencies.
- ◇ The RAC's role in the planning process is most useful when fully engaged.
- ◇ Planning is an ongoing, living process. Not a book-on-a-shelf. Needs review and monitoring. Needs reporting back to the organization and make adjustments.
- ◇ All parties must be clear on what the targets are. We also need to understand the targets will change when new information comes available.
- ◇ RACs need to report back to our constituency, and gather information from constituents.
- ◇ How do we handle problem participants? How do we become more broadly involved in the community? How do we share with local communities on BLM programs?

Policy:

- ◇ How can we revitalize the RAC process so that we feel like our time and effort is worth it? RACs need to work with BLM to choose wisely the work that will be most beneficial to the public, opening up information lines.
- ◇ The RAC's role is to advise BLM by being a sounding board, and a conduit for information between staff and stakeholders.
- ◇ RACs need to know what's happening in BLM so we can make decisions on how best to spend our time. (Annual work plan)
- ◇ Science should be incorporated. Standards should be applied to all uses, not just grazing. We can provide a forum for the use of Science in BLM programs.
- ◇ RACs can be a catalyst for all stakeholders.

Blackfoot/Bear Wild & Scenic River Study: Review of study, which is a preliminary step in the Resource Management Planning Process. There is some confusion about the process – a misconception that we are pushing a designation rather than studying whether a river is eligible for inclusion. There are two main criteria for eligibility: (1) Whether a river is free-flowing, and (2) whether the river has at least one “outstandingly remarkable value.” This requires a comparison on other rivers in the area.

After Eligibility study is completed, we give the river a tentative classification: Wild (inaccessible), Scenic (free of impoundments, but accessible by road), or Recreational (may have some developments, and accessible by road or rail). After tentative classification comes Suitability. Only eligible segments of the river will be included in this study.

The Blackfoot River seems only to have one segment that may be eligible: the canyon section just below Canyon creek to Senior Creek (segment 9). We also have other comments that we have to reconcile. We also need to discuss this issue, particularly segment 9, with the Tribe and private landowners. So far, no response from either of those groups.

If segments are found eligible, the river is to be managed as if it were a Wild and Scenic River until the Suitability study can be completed. Sometimes years pass between the two phases, but in this case, we anticipate beginning the Suitability phase as soon as the Eligibility phase is complete – about mid to late December. More rounds of public meetings are on the way, probably in January.

Charlotte Reid, chair of the Blackfoot Watershed Council: BWC has been in existence since 1996. Our group has looked into other rivers that have been designated, and they are concerned about the potential impacts. Blaine has been good to bear with us and try to explain it. We used a BLM protocol (Properly Functioning Condition criteria in S&Gs) to assess the river to see how the river is performing. We are also working to educate local people on improved grazing practices, impacts from increased human development. We have looked at other designations, and a WSR designation can increase property values, and make development more attractive. We have found that there is wide

variation from season to season and from year to year on the stream flows that can affect stream-side resources. We have changed some grazing management and seen improvement in vegetation density. We have also noticed problems with noxious weeds (we would like to investigate bio-controls), and OHV use, and problems with respect for private property.

Among the negative concerns we are hearing is an issue about the use of condemnation to reduce the price of the private land, but there is only an isolated case as to where that has been used. Another is water rights, and we've tried to explain that this would not affect valid and existing water rights. Water quality is another concern.

Fire Management Direction Amendments: Update on the process. We had 58 people come to 6 scoping meetings, plus written comments from some people who did not attend. More than 200 distinct comments were received. We met as a team and categorized those comments and discussed whether they dealt with the proposed action or some other subject.

Presently, we have four alternatives. The No Action alternative is our present management, with limited work in Hazardous Fuels accumulations. The proposed action allows us to take advantage of recent fire funding to increase our capability for fire suppression and hazardous fuels reduction. It also increases our capability to conduct rehab and restoration. The Sagebrush Steppe Alternative leans toward improving conditions in favor of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and associated wildlife. We had some trouble pinning people down on the needs of sagebrush obligates, but they worked on it. The Optimum Fire Rotation alternative maximizes fire returns, assuming we didn't have human involvement. This will help us compare historical fire rotation with current rotation.

Q: (Gwen): Don't you already have studies in place so that you don't have to do it all again? A: Some of the literature for forest is well documented, but it's less the case for range ecosystems.

Among the things we're finding is that we have two systems – a shrub system in the Snake River Plain, and a conifer system in the uplands. We're also finding that both systems are out of whack. The plain is burning too frequently, and the uplands aren't burning frequently enough.

Next steps: We are working on writing the EIS; Chapter 3 was just delivered to us last week from our contractor in Utah, and Chapters 1 and 2 are on the way. We hoped to have the document out for public review about December 18. That's going to slip a bit because of some clearances before we can go to the printer. We're really looking the first couple of months of the New Year. After it's printed, we'll go back to our mailing list and distributing the document to the public.

Here's what you can do – encourage your constituents when the draft is released, attend the meetings coming up in Feb, and also review the document and comment back to the BLM.

From Terry to RAC: What have you heard from the public?

Bob Bronson: I heard from two individuals, and they said the same thing: when a fire occurs, we expect the BLM will send all the manpower to suppress it and then rehab it later. They have a hard time seeing that it might change. Perhaps rehab and restoration will be the big issues here. We thought you were reducing hazardous fuels on the rehab project for many years. A: The document will help us understand whether what we have been doing is the right level of action, or too much, or too little. We know we're doing good work, but whether it's having an effect is another question.

Bob B: Five or six years ago, the permittees were asked where they would like to see fires burn and we suggested. Nothing ever became of it. A: And I'm assuming that that documentation is being brought forward to let fires burn where they should.

Ken: That pretty well describes the pendulum effect of the let-burn, don't-let-it-burn policy shifts. I think what you're saying is that the document will put science behind the policy and let others know what works and what doesn't. There are areas in the Sagebrush Steppe that have become too dense of sage grouse, and I hope that point is being considered. There are other areas that because of the type of sage growing, a more aggressive fire regime is required. There are other areas where less fire is better for the sage.

Q: (Kelly): Any interaction with the USFS on this? There are a lot of common boundaries. A: We approached the USFS early in the process, and we continue to do so. Also State Lands.

Kelly: You're also trying to participate yourself in the right location so that when a natural strike occurs, you can manage it. Likely at the same time, you may have other demands from other fires. Might you have conflicting priorities? A: Yes, if we need to suppress one at the same time as we baby-sit another. We hope that the natural fires only occur within prescription, including optimal weather conditions. Usually that doesn't happen in July and August. If we run into conflicting priorities, then we put requests into the system as we would a regular wildfire to see if we get resources from other states.

Bob: How will you deal with livestock removal if you get such a fire? A: We hope that's a detail we cover in the project-level analysis.

Dennis: Does this change your relationship with rural/volunteer fire departments? A: We need the rurals to help us out, certainly, otherwise we don't have resources enough to meet the demand.

Next meeting: Burley – BLM Fire Warehouse Conference Room. February 26-27. K Lynn Bennett will be attending.

Suggested items:

- OHV Planning: How to get started? How does the public learn about it?
- Update FMDA – include impacts/relationship with RFDs (Dennis Crane request)
- National RAC Video Conference: Pat Avery update
- RAC Chairs' meetings with State Director (Kelly Adams)
- Idaho's new State Director: Introductions and Dialogue: K Lynn Bennett
- Planning for Goose Creek Allotment tour (Apr/May)
- BLM/USFS Joint Projects (Service First)
- Craters Update from subgroup, public workshops completed (February)
- Sage Grouse: email traffic